

GENESIS

Chapter 50

Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. 4 And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 5 'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me." Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.'" 6 And Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear." 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. 9 And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company. 10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation, and he made a mourning for his father seven days. 11 When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan. 12 Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them, 13 for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. 14 After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

50:1–3 *fell on his father's face ... kissed.* Shows Joseph's great love for Jacob; a fulfillment of 46:4. *embalm.* Egyptian custom of embalming involved removal of organs and packing the chest cavity with mixtures of salt, spices, and herbs to prevent decay. *seventy days.* 40 days of embalming plus 30 days of mourning. The extended time emphasizes the importance of Jacob and of Joseph's family in Egypt (Pharaoh received 72 days of mourning). (TLSB)

50:2 *physicians embalmed him.* † Joseph ordered the physicians to embalm his father because the journey to Canaan necessitated the preservation of his remains. Professional embalmers could have been hired for the purpose, but Joseph perhaps wanted to avoid involvement with the pagan religious ceremonies accompanying their services. (CSB)

50:3 *forty days ... seventy days.* The two periods probably overlapped. (CSB)

50:5 *hewed out.* Or "bought," as the Hebrew for this verb is translated in Hos 3:2 (see also Dt 2:6). (CSB)

go up. To Hebron, which has a higher elevation than Goshen. (CSB)

50:10–12 *threshing floor ... beyond the Jordan.* Near Jericho. Implies that the procession approached Israel on a route like the one the children of Israel would later travel when approaching the Promised Land (cf Nu 22:1; Jsh 2:1). (TLSB)

50:10 *threshing floor*. Grain was threshed on a flat circular area, either of rock or of pounded earth. Threshing floors were located on an elevated open place exposed to the wind, usually at the edge of town or near the main gate (see 1Ki 22:10). See note on Ru 1:22. (CSB)

49:28–50:14 Jacob insists on burial in Canaan, Israel’s permanent home. He receives the most ornate funeral in the Bible, which also shows Joseph’s importance. The grief at Jacob’s death reflects the reality of sin, death’s cause (cf 2:17), and yet also the dignity of the human body. Our funeral customs are a way of confessing that God has promised to raise the dead. Christ Jesus has conquered death for our sake (1Co 15:55–57). • Lord Jesus, we praise You for Your resurrection, which conquered sin and death. Amen. (TLSB)

God's Good Purposes

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” **16** So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: **17** ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.”’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. **18** His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” **19** But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? **20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. **21** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

50:15 *hate us and pay us back*. Similarly, Esau had once planned to kill Jacob as soon as Isaac died (see 27:41). (CSB)

The brothers, still troubled by their sin, doubted Joseph’s forgiveness. Luther: “For it is not without great difficulty that the heart longs for the kindness and pardon of God, from whom it flees and turns away by nature when it feels that He has been offended by many great and enormous sins. Then it is hard to grant admittance to consolation, and it is difficult for remission to cling to the heart, no matter with how many promises and with how many signs of God’s goodwill it has been confirmed. From this one can gather what a sharp poison sin is in man’s nature” (AE 8:324). (TLSB)

Joseph’s brothers, father, and extended family had been living in Egypt now for seventeen years (47:28), but complete reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers had not taken place. The ten brothers had lived in guilt of their evil deeds toward Joseph, but in the assurance that Joseph would not harm them while their father was still alive, causing Jacob more grief. Now that Jacob was dead, they feared that Joseph was “holding a grudge against them” (*yistemenu*) and would finally retaliate in revenge, “reversing to us” (*wehashev*) the evil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

A guilty conscience is a terrible thing to live with. The brothers couldn’t erase the haunting memories of what they had done thirty-nine years earlier. (PBC)

There was no end of possibilities that their excited imagination conjured up before them. (Leupold)

50:16-17 Commentators are divided on whether Jacob actually gave this command to Joseph through his brothers or whether they made the story up in a desperate attempt to save their own

lives. It is likely that the ten brothers are continuing their past practice of deceit (37:32), which had gone on for over twenty years of watching their father grieve over Joseph. If Jacob had made this command, he probably would have done so much earlier, and he would have spoken to Joseph himself. Joseph seems to have been present at his father's final words before his death (50:1), another opportune time to tell this to Joseph. It is merely conjecture, but this first appeal from the ten brothers perhaps came in a message sent to Joseph, perhaps by Benjamin, to soften him up. Joseph wept at this request, hurt that his brothers feared him and had now suffered unnecessarily for seventeen more years, thinking he would harm them. Joseph had forgiven them long ago and was not burdened with thoughts of revenge. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

50:16 *sent a message.* They were afraid to approach Joseph. (TLSB)

It also dawned on them that since their father was no longer around they were totally at the mercy of Joseph. Would he now finally settle accounts with the brothers who had treated him so shamefully? They sent a message to Joseph, perhaps through Benjamin. (PBC)

There is a measure of mistrust revealed by the brothers. (Leupold)

Your father gave this command. Either the brothers were lying, or this fact was not mentioned earlier. (TLSB)

50:17 *forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sins* – The best aid to the understanding of the entire situation is to use the approach set forth with greatest emphasis by Luther, who pictures graphically what a bitter thing sin is – easy to commit, but after it has come to light it rears its ugly head, and it prick keeps rankling, “so that no forgiveness and comfort are strong enough to alleviate the bite and to remove the prick.” Consequently, their feeling of guilt is their primary trouble. (Leupold)

Joseph wept. Joseph may have been saddened by the thought that his brothers might be falsely implicating their father in their story. Or he may have regretted his failure to reassure them sooner that he had already forgiven them. (CSB)

He wept tears of sadness – sadness over the torture his brothers must have been going through, sadness also over the fact that they had not believed him when he assured them of his forgiveness. (PBC)

50:18 *fell down before him.* A final fulfillment of Joseph's earlier dreams (see note on 37:7; see also 37:9). (CSB)

The brothers joined the messengers, gratefully and repentantly acknowledging Joseph. (TLSB)

fell. Extreme form of bowing, expressing repentance (Gn 50:18), fearful submission (Nu 22:31), awe (Nu 24:4; 22:31), pleading (Nu 14:5), humility (Nu 16:4, 22, 45; 20:6; Lk 8:41), worship (Lk 17:16), or grief (Mk 14:35). (TLSB p. 1276)

Following the brothers' message to Joseph, the ten now appear before Joseph and beg for their lives. Joseph's earlier, prophetic dreams (37:5–9) were being fulfilled for a second time as his brothers were again bowing before him in obeisance (as they had done years earlier before he, as ruler of Egypt, had revealed himself to them, 42:6, 9). The irony is that they now offer to serve

him, as years before they had sold him into servitude. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

We are your servants. They had earlier expressed a similar willingness, but under quite different circumstances (see 44:9, 33). (CSB)

They did not assume rights of brotherhood but rather of servitude (cf Lk 15:19). (TLSB)

Their sorrow is so genuine and their repentance so genuine that these brothers come on the heels of their messenger and offer themselves to Joseph as his slaves. (Leupold)

50:19 *do not fear* – Complete forgiveness gets rid of fear.

Although standing second in command of all Egypt, Joseph attempts to quell his brothers' needless fear by humbly appealing to God's complete rule in matters of judgment and vengeance, asking, "Am I in the stead (*hathachath*) of God?" Joseph has had years of perspective in watching the mysterious plans of God unfold into great blessings for countless people, and who is he to question God's methods? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment."

Am I in the place of God? Vengeance belongs to God alone (Rm 12:19). As a brother, Joseph is to pardon and forgive. (TLSB)

The person who takes vengeance tries to play God, and Joseph had no stomach for that. (PBC)

Its meaning is: have I the right to do so? Joseph explains this by saying that the proof of God's control of the situation lies in the fact that where they on their part did devise evil against him, God devised it for good – a remarkable example of God's concurrence, overriding the evil consequence of the wicked deed to bring about results remarkably blessed. (Leupold)

50:20 *God meant it for good.*† Their act, out of personal animosity toward a brother, had been used by God to save life—the life of the Israelites, the Egyptians and all the nations that came to Egypt to buy food in the face of a famine that threatened the known world. All servants of the God of Jacob have the assurance that he intends it for good when they suffer injustice (1Pe 1:6–7; 4:12–14; 5:10; Ro 5:3–5). (CSB)

Luther: "God causes good to result from evil, not that He wants evil to be done, but His goodness is so great even in our wickedness that He cannot do otherwise than forgive sin if the sinner sobs and implores His mercy. If this happens the sin shall be forgiven" (AE 8:330). (TLSB)

God had brought about a change of attitude in the brothers. God furthermore overruled their evil deed and had actually used it to save people from starvation.

Joseph virtually repeats the words he spoke when he first revealed himself to his brothers seventeen years earlier (45:5–8). Did they forget or doubt? Joseph doesn't dismiss his brothers' evil actions but compares them with God's higher intentions. "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (*chashavtem 'alay ra'ah 'elohim chashavah letovah*). Joseph understands that God had a greater purpose in allowing the evil actions of his brothers, as well as those of Potiphar's wife and the forgetful cupbearer of Pharaoh, to hurt him. God turns the evil of

man so that good will come out of it. God meant it for his divine, mysterious purposes that we may or may not ever understand. Here, Joseph sees God's benevolent intent: "to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." That included not only the immediate inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan, but also Jacob's extended family through Judah and his descendants to Jesus, and thus eventually saving all mankind through him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

50:21 *fear not* – This does not imply that the famine was still in progress. But it does suggest that as strangers in Egypt, Jacob's sons could well use an influential person like Joseph to guard their interests and represent their play. (Leupold)

comforted ...spoke kindly. Luther: "You should not sin rashly, confident of obtaining God's pardon; but you should rely on this pardon and find rest in it only when you are in despair. And here the pastor and the ministers of the church should give assistance; and mercy, which is far greater than sin, should be glorified" (AE 8:331–32). (TLSB)

The Hebrew says: "he spoke to their hearts." (Leupold)

Again, Joseph instructs them to "fear not" (*'al-tira'u*) any retaliation against them. The part of repentance with which they struggled most was believing that they had truly been forgiven, both by God and by Joseph. To prove his gracious and loving intentions, Joseph took care of his brothers and their families, just as he had been doing for seventeen years. It is always the Gospel of God's grace and mercy, not the Law, that brings about repentance and changes lives. Finally, Joseph and his brothers were reconciled. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

50:15–21 Jacob's sons fear that only their father's presence prevented Joseph's revenge for their earlier hatred and violence. But Joseph consoles them and speaks kindly to them. Reconciliation should come from the heart and be confirmed by our deeds, just as Joseph provided for his brothers' families in addition to forgiving them. Sin penetrates flesh and spirit and can lead people to despair. To console despairing sinners, God causes the Gospel of reconciliation in Christ to be preached, and He confirms this message with the comforting Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper. • O Lord, though humans meant to do evil to You with the cross, You meant it for good, to bring about eternal salvation. Praise to You, O Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

The Death of Joseph

22 So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. 23 And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. 24 And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." 26 So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

50:23 *saw...the third generation.* Cf. Job's experience (Job 42:16). (CSB)

Makir. Manasseh's firstborn son and the ancestor of the powerful Gileadites (Jos 17:1). The name of Makir later became almost interchangeable with that of Manasseh himself (see Jdg 5:14). (CSB)

counted as Joseph's own. Joseph probably adopted Makir's children (see note on 30:3). (CSB)

May mean adoption. Or, Joseph simply lived long enough to hold his great-grandchildren on his lap. (TLSB)

50:24 *brothers.* Perhaps used here in a broader sense than siblings. (CSB)

Either his brothers outlived him, or this refers to the tribes bearing his brothers' names. (TLSB)

God will ... bring you up out of this land. Joseph did not forget God's promises (cf. 15:16; 46:4; 48:21) concerning "the exodus" (Heb 11:22). (CSB)

50:25 *carry my bones up from this place.* Centuries later Moses did so to fulfill his ancestor's oath (see Ex 13:19). Joseph's bones were eventually "buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought ... from the sons of Hamor" (Jos 24:32; see Ge 33:19). (CSB)

Although Joseph, as the vizier of Egypt, would initially be buried there, Joseph knew the Promised Land was Canaan. (TLSB)

50:26 *Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten.* See v. 22. Ancient Egyptian records indicate that 110 years was considered to be the ideal life span; to the Egyptians this would have signified divine blessing upon Joseph. (CSB)

50:22–26 The death of Joseph after 93 years in Egypt closes the first Book of Moses, but his request for final burial in Canaan reminds us that the story has only begun. Joseph's life illustrates one of God's promises for obedience to the Law—prosperous, long life (Ex 20:12). Despite his long, prosperous life, Joseph looks forward, not back: "God *will* surely visit you" (v 25). Egypt's material prosperity is not God's ultimate blessing for His people. The coming gift is the Lord Himself, His visitation, fulfilled in part in the exodus from Egypt. But even the exodus pales before God's final visitation in the Messiah (Lk 1:68) and its culmination when the bones of Joseph and all the redeemed are raised to immortality (1Co 15:53–57). • "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock!" (Ps 80:1). Give us hearts that long for Your return to lead us out of the Egypt of this world to Yourself in heaven. Amen. (TLSB)